

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LAGOS 14355 281058Z
ACTION AF-08

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PA-01 /024 W
-----281101Z 008635 /20
P R 280917Z DEC 76
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8412
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ABLD, AMGT, PFOR, SOPN, NI
SUBJECT: VOA AND NEW YORK TIMES PULLING OUT

1. WE TRUST AFRICAN BUREAU HAS BEEN KEPT IN THE PICTURE BY VOA REGARDING DECISION TO CLOSE VOA LAGOS BUREAU AND MOVE JOHN ROBERTS TO ABIDJAN.

2. EMBASSY HAD THOUGH MAJOR CONSIDERATION FAVORING THE MOVE WAS HOUSING CRISIS BROUGHT ON BY LANDLORD'S DEVISING INGENIOUS GIMMICK SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THAT DOUBLED ROBERTS' RENT. VOA REFUSED PAY. EMBASSY THEN IMPROVISED A SOLUTION THAT WOULD HAVE PROVIDED EQUIVALENT HOUSING AT LITTLE EXTRA COST, BUT VOA DECIDED ROBERTS SHOULD CLOSE OUT ANYWAY.

3. PRIME REASON FOR VOA DECISION APPEARS HAVE BEEN THE RELATIVELY HASSLE-FREE WORKING ENVIRONMENT OF ABIDJAN COMPARED WITH LAGOS, E.G. QUICK TELEPHONE TO WASHINGTON (IT TAKES FROM SEVERAL HOURS TO SEVERAL DAYS TO GET THROUGH FROM LAGOS), EASIER CONTACT WITH NEWS SOURCES, AVAILABILITY OF OTHER WIRE SERVICES, BETTER AIR SERVICE TO OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES (INCLUDING A 30-MINUTE TRIP TO AIRPORT COMPARED WITH FOUR HOURS IN LAGOS), ETC.

4. WE UNDERSTAND THAT NEW YORK TIMES WILL MAKE SAME DECISION
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PAGE 02 LAGOS 14355 281058Z

AFTER FESTAC, AND FOR SIMILAR REASONS.

5. FROM POINT OF VIEW OF US/NIGERIAN RELATIONSHIP WE VERY MUCH REGRET LOSING ROBERTS ACD DARNTON. THEIR REPORTING FORTIFIED CURRENTLY IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, AND THEIR CONTINUING PRESENCE WOULD HAVE BEEN SYMBOLIC OF STRONGER TIES EXPECTED UNDER

THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION. THEIR DEPARTURE IS UNTIMELY, AND
THEIR ABSENCE WILL BE NOTED. WA WISH THERE WERE SOME WAY ONE
OR BOTH COULD STAY BUT WE DOUBT THERE IS MUCH MORE WE CAN DO FROM
HERE.
EASUM

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